

## Message Text

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73

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SY-05

SCCT-01 DHA-02 IO-13 /078 W  
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R 241535Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 934  
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA  
AMEMBASSY PANAMA  
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE  
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR  
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINS, NU  
SUBJECT: PRESS CENSORSHIP: OPPRESSIVE OR MILD?

SUMMARY: THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL RECENT INDICATIONS THAT PRESS CENSORSHIP, AT LEAST AS IT RELATES TO OPPOSITION POLITICAL ACTIVITY, MAY BE LOOSENING. THIS MAY BE DUE TO THE GON RECENTLY SHIFTING THE CENSORSHIP FUNCTION FROM A NATIONAL GUARD (GN) OFFICER TO A CIVILIAN WITH JOURNALISTIC EXPERIENCE. TO OPPONENTS OF THE SOMOZA REGIME, HOWEVER, CENSORSHIP IS LIKE PREGNANCY--IT EITHER EXISTS OR IT DOESN'T; THERE AREN'T ANY INTERMEDIATE DEGREES. END SUMMARY.

1. CENSORSHIP WAS IMPOSED IN NICARAGUA IN LATE DECEMBER, 1974 AS A CONCOMITANT TO THE MARTIAL LAW IMPOSED AT THAT TIME. THE RESTRICTION OF FREEDOMS WAS THE GON RESPONSE TO THE FSLN GUERRILLA OPERATION WHICH FORCED THE GON TO RELEASE GUERRILLA SUSPECTS, PAY RANSOM AND FLY THE REVOLUTIONARIES TO CUBA TO EXECUTE RELEASE OF PROMINENT GOVERNMENTAL AND SOCIALITE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HOSTAGES. ALTHOUGH THE PURPORTED JUSTIFICATION FOR CENSOR-

SHIP WAS TO PRECLUDE ANY IMPEDIMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORT TO ELIMINATE THE TERRORIST THREAT, IT HAS BEEN USED TO SILENCE VARYING FORMS OF CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT. IN PARTICULAR, PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO, EDITOR OF LA PRENSA AND LEADER OF UDEL, A COALITION OF OPPOSITION POLITICANS, HAS HAD SEVERAL ARTICLES CENSORED.

2. IN MID-JUNE, 1976, FOLLOWING NUMEROUS COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE CENSORSHIP AND AN APPEAL TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA BY THE OPPOSITION CONSERVATIVE PARTY (PCN-P) LEADERSHIP, THE CENSORSHIP FUNCTION WAS TRANSFERRED FROM THE OFFICE OF LAWS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OF THE GN TO A CIVILIAN OFFICIAL OF THE PRESIDENTIAL SECRETARIAT. THE NEW CENSOR, ALEJANDRO ORTEGA GUTIERREZ, IS AN EX-DIRECTOR OF THE SOMOZA-FAMILY NEWSPAPER, NOVEDADES. IN RECENT WEEKS FOR THE FIRST TIME PHOTOGRAPHS AND INFORMATION REGARDING THE ORGANIZATIONAL ACITVITIES OF UDEL HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO APPEAR IN LA PRENSA.

3. FURTHERMORE, THERE HAVE BEEN MANY RECENT PRESS REPORTS RELATED TO U.S. AND INTERNAIONAL CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, E.G., THE IN TOTO TRANSLATION OF TIME'S RECENT FEATUE STORY ON TORTURE. THE FACT THAT FATHER FERNANDO CARDENAL TESTIFIED BEFORE THE FRASER COMMITTEE AGAINST CONDITIONS IN NICARAGUA WAS REPORTED AND DENONCED. SPECIFIC CRITICISM OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY THE GN HAVE NOT APPEARED AND PRESUMABLY WOULD BE CENSORED. THE HEIGHTENED INTERNATIONAL CONCERN OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IS AN ISSUE, HOWEVER, WHICH THE GON APPARENTLY BELIEVES CANNOT BE KEPT FROM THE PEOPLE, DESPITE THE FACT THE GON MAY HAVE SKELETONS IN ITS OWN CLOSET.

4. PRESS CENSOR ORTEGA RECENTLY MET WITH EMB OFFICERS AND EXPLAINED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S CENSORSHIP WAS "MUY SUAVE" (VERY MILD). HE EXPLAINED THAT THERE WERE ONLY TWO JURIDICALLY RECOGNIZED POLITICAL PARTIES, THE LIBERALS AND THE CONSERVATIVES, AND THAT THEIR ACTIVITIES WERE NOT CENSORED. THIS PRESUMABLY EXPLAINED WHY UDEL ACTIVITIES HAD BEEN CENSORED, BUT HE POINTED OUT THAT EVEN UDEL HAD NOW SEEN THE LIGHT OF DAY ON THE PRINTED PAGE.

5. UDEL LEADER CHAMORRO, ON THE OTHER HAND, REMAINS AN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF CENSORSHIP. HE CHARACTERIZED TO EMB OFFICERS THE FACT THAT THE NEW CENSOR HAD ALLOWED PUBLICATION OF A PHOTO OF A UDEL MEETING AS INSIGNIFICANT. SINCE THAT TIME, A SIMILAR PHOTO APPEARED IN LA PRENSA AND ON AUGUST 12 AN ARTICLE WAS PRINTED REGARDING PAST AND FUTURE PUBLIC MEETINGS OF UDEL. ALSO, ON AUGUST 23, AN EDITORIAL BY CHAMORRO APPEARED IN LA PRENSA ATTACKING THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY FOR ITS LACK OF ACTIVE OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT AND

IMPLYING THAT THE CONSERVATIVES WERE CAPTIVES OF THE GOVERNMENT.

6. COMMENT: GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP OF ITS POLITICAL POSITION IS CLEARLY NOT ABSOLUTE AND SHOWS DEFINITE SIGNS OF BECOMING MORE "SUAVE". THE COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION SHOULD SERVE TO KEEP THE GON MINDFUL OF THE NEED TO CLEAN ITS OWN CLOSETS. HOWEVER, THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE STRONG FEELINGS OF OPPOSITION TO ANY FORM OF CENSORSHIP AMONG MANY ELEMENTS OF NICARAGUA'S POLITICAL ELITE, AND THE GON SHOWS NO SIGNS OF ENDING CENSORSHIP IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, I.E., AS LONG AS THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL INVESTIGATION OF THE 1974 FSLN INCIDENT AND OTHER FSLN ACTIVITIES CONTINUES.

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